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*ADAPTIVE PLANNING AND THE NATURE OF WAR:  
OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS VIS-A-VIS VIETNAM*

BY

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LTCOL

USMC

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the naval war college in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature Mark J. Brousseau

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## ABSTRACT

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An essential requirement at all levels of war is the willingness to reassess the basic assumptions that frame the national response. These assumptions derive from the determination of the war's/crisis' nature - the sine qua non for national response - and are an essential concern to the operational commander. The adaptive planning framework provides a methodology to address flawed assumptions resultant from a misdetermination of the nature of war. Incorporation of the operational level in initial planning stages of the national response provides for continuity of planning and meaningful feedback from a level uniquely situated to analyze the effectiveness and correlation of strategy and tactical actions. Thus, adaptive planning offers a framework to redress incongruities of means/ends and invalid assumptions toward a refocused national response.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Adaptive planning formalizes a new dimension of the operational level of war, the inclusion of all elements of national power: military, political, diplomatic and economic. To properly function within this framework, the operational commander must elevate his conceptual scope beyond military strategy to that of national policy/strategy. The sine qua non of strategic and operational levels is the determination of the nature of the war/crisis which provides the framework and assumptions within which all strategic and operational plans are formulated. Adaptive planning demands a valid assessment of the war's/crisis' nature by the operational commander to properly recommend efficacious national power options to the National Command Authority (NCA) and execute his own responsibility of translating national/military strategy into tactical actions. Vietnam offers an exceptional case study of how a war's qualitative nature can be misdetermined and result in a marginal military strategy and misdirected operational level implementation of that strategy.

This paper will examine operational level implications of the adaptive planning concept and nature of war/crisis determination in relation to national policy/strategy levels. A detailed analysis of the nature of the Vietnam war will endeavor to convey the intricacies and qualitative nature of such an analysis and the need for the operational commander to question the basic assumptions derived therein.

## CHAPTER II

### ADAPTIVE PLANNING

What is adaptive planning? It is a recently formulated framework within the deliberate planning process designed to expand the role of the operational commander and provide greater flexible response during crisis development. It avoids the cold war approach of "all" (war) or "nothing" (non-intervention) by providing a range of options to deter further crisis development before it reaches the "all" stage of response.

Adaptive planning option success depends on crisis development rate and national response time. Options are listed in increasing levels of deterrence to provide a suitable response during any stage of crisis development. This can be a two-edged sword. If the chosen response provides a credible deterrent (one that is sufficiently forceful and conveys the will/resolution to use it if necessary) and is applied in a timely manner further crisis escalation could well be arrested. Conversely, should the chosen response either lack credibility for the current stage of crisis development or be implemented late, the approach risks an incremental escalation and involvement leading to war. The possibility of war requires decision makers to either prepare for the eventuality of war or resolve to disengage when the cost-benefit analysis no longer favors continuation. While a disengagement cost-benefit analysis may seem straight forward at the outset, it has significant pitfalls. Once engaged, qualitative political aspects, such as invested national and personal prestige, take on increasing weight. Additionally, the qualitative perception of the cumulative investment of prior

actions may be greater than the actual quantitative costs. This is due, in part, to the actions of those in positions of responsibility who may feel it necessary to "oversell" their chosen course of action. In short, the ability to disengage may become more difficult than initially perceived by the decision makers. However, the possibility of incremental escalation leading to war presents its own difficulties. Incrementalism does not provide the means or opportunity to enlist the full support of the people toward the eventuality of war. In fact, the political appeal of incrementalism is that crisis development can be curtailed without resort to war. Failure to achieve full support of the people at the outset exacerbates mobilizing political will at a later stage should the crisis significantly escalate due to the failure of previous actions. Clearly, national interest and political will must be established prior to any commitment or intervention in a developing crisis. This is a critical aspect of current discussions focused on Yugoslavia. Regardless, the adaptive planning process does offer a list of time-lined options short of "all" for a general regional scenario thereby providing a point of departure for intervention in a given crisis situation.

Adaptive planning options are divided into three (3) general situation/response categories.<sup>1</sup> The first situation represents a slow building instability/crisis during peacetime conditions. Early response is the objective when implementing Flexible Deterrent Options (FDO's) sufficiently credible to deter escalation and defuse the situation. Available options utilize the full range of national power: military, political, diplomatic and economic. Military options deal with Case 1 forces - active duty, rapidly deployable and limited in scale and scope.<sup>2</sup> The

intent is to combine all elements of national power into an integrated and synergistic national response not offered by an uncoordinated or unipower approach. Thus, the operational level is wholly engaged with the application of full spectrum national power in translating strategy into tactical actions and not limited, as in the past, to military means alone.

The second situation postulates short warning for a crisis escalating into imminent or actual conflict that requires a deploy to fight response. This stage may have been preceded by either the implementation of FDO's that failed or no action at all. Again, the stress is on early deployment of sufficient force (Case 2 forces) to protect U.S. interests and allow for the further deployment of decisive forces (Case 3 forces) to achieve the desired end-state. Case 2 forces build on Case 1 forces with the addition of other active duty and some selected reserve units. Case 3 forces build upon the preceding two force levels with the inclusion of a Presidential Selective Reserve Call-up and partial reinforcement mobilization. Case 3 forces represent the focus of CINC OPLANS.<sup>3</sup> While increasingly focused on military means, the national response should utilize and integrate the full range of national power.

The third situation stipulates a no-warning attack either on U.S. forces or against U.S. interests wherein the only response is counterattack. This requires the deployment and employment of forces after hostilities have been initiated. Case 4 forces build further on the preceding force structure by including additional active and reserve forces under partial mobilization.<sup>4</sup>

Case force delineation provides the means to deconflict multiple concurrent contingencies. Adaptive planning assumes a maximum of two overlapping Major Regional Contingencies (MRC's).<sup>5</sup>



Previously, CINCs were apportioned forces on an exclusive basis. Currently, the downsizing of force structure necessitates multiapportionment to meet all contingency options. In the advent of concurrent contingencies, Case force delineation allows regional CINCs to assess the probable availability of forces for allocation within their theaters. Combined with NCA prioritization of U.S. interests (outlined in JSCP), this structure will hopefully avoid the risk of either premature or overcommitment of national power to a given contingency.<sup>6</sup>

The significance of adaptive planning for the operational commander is twofold. First, the incorporation of all elements of national power in operational level planning requires the operational commander and staff to greatly broaden their professional knowledge and scope of conceptualization. This is especially true when the national response incorporates the full range of national power necessitating the close coordination and integration of military operations. Operational commanders and staffs must ensure their professional knowledge and expertise extend to the analysis and use of all national power elements appropriate to crisis resolution. Further, due to the unique situation often encountered in conflicts wherein the military commander controls the majority of in-theater assets, the operational commander may be charged with the conveyance and application of nonmilitary power. Clearly, operational staffs need some expansion to incorporate in-house expertise as well as additional liaison links to government agencies and organizations dealing with national power responses. Without staff expansion, the operational commander is without the necessary support to formulate cogent recommendations and, if needed, effective implementation. Second, the inclusion of the operational

commander in national level crisis planning offers new opportunities for a more coherent national response. Specifically, operational level recommendations could initiate a reassessment of NCA assumptions and direction of response either during the initial planning process or during the execution phase as a result of operational feedback. This, in turn, requires operational commanders to conceptualize the employment of allocated forces within the context of national policy/military strategy. While political, diplomatic and economic strategy may be decided at higher levels, he must provide recommendations for their use and ensure that the application of military force is in consonance with the direction of the integrated national response. The operational commander is part of the national planning/feedback system and must fully understand the underlying assumptions and direction of the national response to effectively execute his responsibilities - no longer limited to military means alone.

## CHAPTER III

### VIETNAM

This chapter will focus on the adaptive planning concept and its relation to the determination of the war's nature - the basis and framework for establishing strategic and operational assumptions. Vietnam offers an excellent example of a conflict wherein the lack of an effective operational level of command and misdetermination of the war's nature resulted in a failed military strategy and operational misdirection. The paper will focus primarily on post March 1965 Vietnam after the introduction of U.S. Marines - the first regular ground forces in Vietnam.

#### Operational Level of Command

The first aspect of operational war in Vietnam is the realization that an operational level command was never fully empowered. The CINC of the Pacific Command (CINCPAC) was the designated theater of war commander under the NCA and ultimately responsible for military strategy in Vietnam as well as other areas (ie. Korea, etc.).<sup>7</sup> Vietnam represented a theater of operations in which the Commander, U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) should have been the theater of operations CINC. Alternatively, COMUSMACV could have been designated as a separate unified command under the NCA to act as both theater of war and operations CINC.<sup>8</sup> In either situation, COMUSMACV should have had operational command of all in-theater military forces including those of the Vietnamese. In reality, a multitude of civilian agencies (CIA, etc.) and military organizations conducted a variety of operations independent of COMUSMACV direction.<sup>9</sup> This violation of unity of command and

effort also led to the ineffectual application of operational art and resulted in an overemphasis on tactical actions disconnected from a coordinated national strategy. Further aggravating the command situation, the NCA often bypassed the chain of command through CINCPAC. Upon occasion, the NCA even bypassed COMUSMACV and authorized direct tactical actions, especially air operations against North Vietnam.<sup>10</sup>

#### Nature of War<sup>11</sup>

"the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into something that is alien to its nature."<sup>12</sup>

Civil War: a war between opposing groups of citizens of the same country. (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1975, p. 205)

Revolution: the overthrow or renunciation of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed. (Webster's, p. 992)

Insurgency: a condition of revolt against a government that is less than an organized revolution and that is not recognized as belligerency (war). (Webster's, p. 600)

War: a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations. (Webster's, p. 1318)

Prerequisite to effective national policy/strategy and operational planning is the correct determination of the nature of the war/crisis. This responsibility ultimately lies at the national policy/strategy level (NCA/theater of war). However, the operational commander requires a thorough understanding of the war's nature to apply the operational art in translating strategy into tactical actions. The nature of a war/crisis defines the operating environment and offers a model for analyzing response effectiveness. This is of particular

consequence when the situation requires not only military but political, diplomatic and economic elements as well to achieve the desired end-state.

Analysis of a war's/crisis' nature is fundamental to all future decisions and reassessments. It provides the framework for determination of the assumptions upon which strategic and operational level decisions are predicated. Vietnam offers an excellent example of how a misdetermination of a war's nature can lead to disaster. Invalid assumptions resulted in misdirected and ineffective actions which, in turn, led to escalating incrementalism as the U.S. increased its levels of response to achieve the desired end-state. The U.S. failed to reassess the validity of either the basic assumptions or direction of national response derived from the initial misdetermination of the war's nature. The following analysis also highlights how such errors can be made and how adaptive planning can provide an opportunity for reassessment at the operational level (uniquely positioned to analyze the congruency of strategy, actions and results) with a subsequent realignment of national response. Minimally, the operational level could have redirected the focus of operations and chosen more accurate Measures Of Effectiveness (MOE's) while remaining within the general guidance provided by the military strategy. The detailed analysis of the war's nature is offered to show how a qualitative difference in emphasis could have led to alternative operational approaches within the established military strategic framework.

## Civil War or Insurgency?

Initially, the NCA viewed the war as an insurgency within a democratic and independent South Vietnam supported by North Vietnam as a precursor to likely invasion by North Vietnamese conventional forces. However, this formulation fails to correctly discern the basic motivation/will and political realities for both the North and South Vietnamese. The perspective of the South Vietnamese government and people is especially critical since it was never the U.S.' intention to remain a permanent fixture in their government. Failure to correctly establish the war's nature led to a misdirected strategy and misapplication of the operational art and resulted in a miscalculation of the means necessary to achieve victory. "We must gauge the strength and situation of the opposing state. We must gauge the character and abilities of its government and people and do the same in regard to our own."<sup>13</sup> In my opinion, the view that Vietnam was in a civil war of reunification over ideological/political national identity more accurately defines the war's nature. If strategic and operational commanders had accepted this view, operational plans would have focused on far different Centers of Gravity (COGs) and Measures of Effectiveness (MOEs) than those chosen. "The identification of the enemy's center of gravity is at the heart of the operational level."<sup>14</sup>

It is important to review relationships in the strategic development process to understand the criticality, and attendant

difficulties, in establishing a war's/crisis' nature. All problem solving requires the analyst (statesman, commander) to properly define the problem (nature of the war) to provide a framework for accurately weighing and assessing all pertinent quantitative and qualitative decision variables (political, diplomatic, military and economic) in developing a solution model (strategy/operational plans). Failure to achieve the above will result, proportional to divergence, in a solution that fails to achieve the desired end-state. Qualitative aspects are much more difficult to assess and weigh than the quantitative, but are equally critical. By its misperception of the war's nature, the United States improperly weighed and assessed the motivation and will of the Vietnamese people (qualitative variables) which resulted in a less than optimal strategy, misdirected operational planning and ineffective tactical actions.

To explain my analysis of the nature of the Vietnam war and the motivation/will of the Vietnamese people, I propose a model of communist expansion in the colonial world that I believe applicable to Vietnam and other similar cases. This model contains two stages of conflict: 1) a nationalist revolutionary war against colonialism and 2) a civil war of ideological and political unification.

The first stage involves the creation of a Maoist based organization that suppresses its *Communist* ideological foundations and openly *foments nationalist* ideals. This approach allows it to mobilize the largest possible power base within a

given nation as it opposes the "colonial imperialism" of a foreign power. Nationalism, with its inherent promise of self-determination, has a broad appeal even for indigenes entrenched in the colonial political structure - increased power as the foreigners depart. The authoritarian and cohesive nature of the communist organizational structure provides for maximum efficiency in insurgent guerrilla warfare. Hence, it becomes a major, if not the main, focal group of the revolutionary nationalist struggle. The Vietnamese generally viewed the Vietminh victory in ending French colonialism in Indo-China as a nationalist struggle for independence and its leader, HO CHI MINH, a nationalist hero.

The second stage of the model focuses on the vacuum of power created by the departing colonial power and resultant internal struggle (civil war) over national ideology and political structure. This commonly involves numerous factions, including the remnants of the indigenous colonial power structure, vying for supremacy. Here again, the Communist organizational structure is uniquely designed to maximum advantage since its cohesive and unified ideology provides a motivated and disciplined power base protected by shrouds of secrecy. This was the stage of the war when the U.S. entered the arena.

In separating the two stages of war, the Geneva Conference of 1954 provided the basis for U.S. misperception of the war's nature. The agreement left North Vietnam as a unified political stronghold for Vietnamese Communists and South Vietnam as an area



of political and religious "others" under the remnants of a discredited colonial government - a breeding ground for dissension and factionalism. If one views Vietnam as a single nation temporarily divided by the Geneva agreement, a reasonable assumption given the promised reunification elections, then the subsequent war, by definition, was a civil war over ideological, political and religious identity. If viewed as a permanent division, for which there is little legal basis, then the war could be seen as an invasion of a sovereign South Vietnam by North Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> These are legal/semantical determinations that are important but ignore the real basis for properly defining the context of the war. The key element for correct determination hinges on one essential element - the motivation/will of the Vietnamese on both sides of the 17th parallel. The inherent strength of Vietnamese nationalism, and the fact that both sides were composed of populations from the North and South who were unwilling to be separated from their ancestral homes, discredits the latter view.

The Vietnamese people have a strong national identity that is founded in culture and geography. Culturally, they perceive their identity, despite regional variances, as uniquely different and superior to surrounding nations and firmly anchored to the land of their ancestors. The former is reflected in their historical international interactions and the latter in their attitudes displayed during the unsuccessful operational level resettlement plan. While occupation by foreign powers may have

either splintered or prevented ideological cohesiveness it did not diminish the Vietnamese cultural identification as a single people.

Viewing the Vietnam war as a civil war is supported by the motivations and will of both sides. As a result of the earlier revolutionary war, the Communists, under their nationalist trappings, had recruited most of the Vietnamese population motivated to fight for Vietnamese self-determination. Most of these forces remained in the North under HO CHI MINH who carefully subordinated his Communist philosophies to the exigencies of national reunification. This is evidenced in HO's ability to recruit southerners to his cause throughout the war as the U.S. presence increasingly appeared to support the vestiges of colonialism during the "Americanization" period. These forces remained dedicated to nationalist principles and were unwilling to accept a divided nation; especially native southerners aligned with the North. North Vietnam initiated irregular warfare only after the South failed to comply with the reunification election stipulated during the Geneva Conference.

South Vietnam, with its divisive political factionalism, had insufficient time and will to establish an ideological focus. President Diem and his successors singularly failed to subordinate personal ambitions in order to unify the South into a "nation" capable of combating northern will. It is my contention that the Saigon leadership had no desire, other than retention of personal power, to form a separate nation. As one South

Vietnamese Saigon official put it "Our big advantage over the Americans is that they want to win the war more than we do."<sup>16</sup> Here to, we see indigenous Northerners in the Southern Vietnam government adding another factor in the antipathy toward establishing an independent nation. The COG of South Vietnam was therefore its lack of political will and unity of purpose.

### **Misperception and Lack of Reassessment**

Why did the U.S. misread the nature of the war? In my opinion, the answer is twofold: 1) The policy of containment and 2) Domestic and International legitimacy. The policy/strategy of containment lends itself to a geographically oriented war. To contain a force one must be able to isolate it. Obviously, the 17th parallel provided a clear geographical demarcation that made implementation of the policy much simpler than treating the whole of Vietnam as a single nation.

Geographical separation also gave credence, despite the lack of legitimacy, to the claim of South Vietnam sovereignty and territorial integrity which provided the basis of establishing U.S. domestic and international legitimacy for overt intervention. It is far easier to assume and promote the morality of combating an invasion/insurgency supported by an outside power than involvement in the internal affairs of a national civil war.

The misperception of the nature of the Vietnam war led the U.S. into a strategy that focused primarily on counterinsurgency tactical actions and underestimated the complexities of the

political issues. Strategic and operational ineffectiveness led, not to reassessment, but to maximization of efforts - more forces, bombs, etc.. Clausewitz suggests "...in that case all proportion between action and political demands would be lost: means would cease to be commensurate with ends and in most cases a policy of maximum exertion would fail because of domestic problems it would raise"<sup>17</sup> - prophetic in view of U.S. domestic reaction. While the U.S. did try to address the political problem of creating a credible South Vietnam government it did so without understanding a basic aspect of the conflict. The U.S. failed to achieve its aim - the establishment of a democratic and viable South Vietnam - because it failed to understand the Vietnamese people's motivation and will. Instead, the U.S. tried to impose its values, objectives and motivation on a people who valued their own cultural and political perceptions more.

Why did the U.S. fail to reassess the basic premise and assumptions of her strategic and operational level plans? I believe there are many aspects to the answer but one predominates. As national and personal prestige became more committed with time, the ability to change basic precepts grew increasingly difficult.<sup>18</sup> The strength of this motivation was strong enough to transcend the change of administrations as each inherited the problem. American prestige was on the line and the Communist threat was a political reality. The policy of containment and acceptance of the Domino theory would not permit either major revision or disengagement without serious political

and personal repercussions - indicated earlier in the adaptive planning section. In President Johnson's case, in particular, another factor becomes prevalent "...those men who habitually act, both in great and minor affairs, on particular dominating impressions or feelings rather than according to strict logic, are hardly aware of the confused, inconsistent, ambiguous situation in which they find themselves."<sup>19</sup> Application of the operational art could have initiated a reassessment of underlying assumptions and direction of response. However, the military was singularly silent during periods when the Johnson Administration was open to change. Their only response was more of the same.

Strategic and operational command level failure to discern the true nature of the Vietnam war facilitated invalid assumptions that resulted in a fragmented strategic and operational approach that failed to adequately identify and weigh all aspects of this multifaceted conflict. "Vietnam ...had every possible kind and degree of incoherence both of objective and of method."<sup>20</sup> The resulting protracted and costly war undermined U.S. will to pursue victory even as it became militarily, if not politically, feasible due to the sheer preponderance of military force. As Clausewitz implies, the U.S., in trying to make the war into something it was not, placed victory out of reach. Incremental escalation of force and involvement resulted in the lack of U.S. political will which became the primary COG for North Vietnamese efforts to disrupt the U.S./South Vietnam alliance.

### Operational Considerations

The difference between determinations of the war's nature lies mainly in their qualitative analysis of the will/motivation of the Vietnamese people which is fundamental in selecting effective COGs and focusing operational direction. Determination of a war's nature defines the threat environment and, in so doing, provides the key to effective solutions. It avoids a "right answer to the wrong problem" dilemma. The essence of my analysis of the nature of the Vietnam war is that of a civil war conducted in the power vacuum left by the French. As such, the South Vietnamese government did not represent an institution with a strong constituency but rather the vestiges of colonial power trying to evolve into a democratic society. It therefore required time and freedom from external intrusion and interference to achieve stability by winning the "hearts and minds" of its population.

If the war's nature is defined as either an insurgency or revolution, presupposing a degree of established government, the strategic/operational focus should have been directed within South Vietnam. In choosing this approach, U.S. operational efforts focused on South Vietnam's internal insurgency and viewed North Vietnamese infiltration and support as secondary. This view resulted in a primary objective of insurgent attrition (with an inevitable body count MOE) and ignores the full extent of North Vietnamese support and intrusion. It is generally accepted that the initial guerilla movement, while predominantly Southern

indigenes, were Minh communist/nationalist supporters. After the TET 1968 offense decimated these forces, North Vietnamese forces played a far greater and more direct role in the insurgent movement. Thus, the support of North Vietnam and its allies was the COG which thwarted U.S. goals. If the war was characterized as either an invasion by the North or a civil war of ideological unification, U.S. military operational focus should have been primarily directed at protecting South Vietnam from North Vietnamese intrusion. To accomplish this, the U.S. needed to isolate North Vietnam with the full spectrum of national power while providing secondary assistance to South Vietnamese internal stabilization efforts. Given the national will to intervene in a civil war at the outset, a conventional warfare approach against North Vietnamese actions could have been far more effective. A consequence of North Vietnamese reluctance to allow a decisive conventional battle in South Vietnam required taking the war to them by direct military operations and political/diplomatic disruption of their alliance with the USSR and China. Lack of U.S. political will precluded effective actions in this regard. While the TET offensives were major U.S. victories, they were not decisive since North Vietnam could still revert to strategic defense (resumption of insurgent guerilla tactics). Regardless, assisting the South Vietnamese government and forces in counterinsurgency was still necessary.

If unification was not sought, as evidenced by the U.S. desire for an independent South Vietnam, the focus of U.S.

secondary operations and MOEs should have been on supporting South Vietnamese government stabilization efforts directed at winning the hearts and minds of its constituent support. The failure of U.S. operations to curtail North Vietnamese intrusion contributed to South Vietnam government destabilization and counterinsurgency inadequacies that ultimately led to "Americanization" of the war - a major flaw if the desired end-state was an independent South Vietnam. Col. Harry Summers was correct in his analysis that the internal stability and counterinsurgency efforts were the responsibility of the South Vietnamese while U.S. efforts should have been directed primarily toward North Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> However, his refusal to acknowledge the major elements of civil war would have misdirected or ignored the qualitative nature of U.S. secondary efforts for stabilization assistance.

#### **Alternative Operational Direction within South Vietnam**

Recognition of a Vietnam civil war provides alternative courses of action despite NCA self-imposed constraints on military operations. These constraints effectively limited strategic and operational level considerations to two fronts: Eliminating infiltration from North Vietnam and winning the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people. The former requires an integrated national response to isolate North Vietnam and disrupt her alliances to the limits imposed by constraints while eliminating North Vietnamese infiltration. Counter infiltration operations often lacked coordination with other



national response measures and became predominantly American as their effectiveness decreased and Southern destabilization increased. Adaptive planning would have provided for a coordinated and integrated the national response using the full range of U.S. economic, political, diplomatic and military power.

Winning hearts and minds required an integrated response to assist the South Vietnamese government in stabilization and populous support operations. The U.S. Marine Corps Civil Action Program (CAP) of October 1967 "...was perhaps the only long term commitment of regular U.S. troops to fight the war on the hamlet level, and to keep the hamlets intact."<sup>22</sup> By combining U.S. and South Vietnamese troops, these U.S. directed tactical actions built constituent support by providing effective and visible government protection while providing the necessary training for the eventual weaning of South forces for independent operations. Unfortunately, the CAP was discontinued because of its irregular nature in a war driven by conventional warfare operations and disconnected strategy. The CIA sponsored Phoenix program was also effective in eliminating the insurgent and North Vietnamese guerilla threat without the wholesale destruction and disruption of South Vietnamese hamlet life.<sup>23</sup> Despite its significant impact, the Phoenix program was implemented too late in the war to be decisive. Another major program was the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program. CORDS integrated all elements of national power and provided the basis for a success counterinsurgency campaign. However, its

fundamental flaw of overreliance on U.S. personnel caused "...the Vietnamese lose the initiative...So the Vietnamese don't rely on themselves. They rely on the Americans."<sup>24</sup> Had the CORDS program integrated South Vietnamese personnel at the outset, it may have been sustainable during the "Vietnamization" of the program under President Nixon. Program results also suffered from late implementation.

These programs were significant because their tactical actions contributed to the desired end-state. They attrited enemy forces through military actions but in a way that strengthened South Vietnamese government control and power by appealing to the hearts and minds of its constituents. In CAP operations "... the Marines learned the importance of linking civic action with psychological operations."<sup>25</sup> Previous conventional search and destroy missions attrited enemy as well, but left the people searching for safety that neither the insurgents nor the South Vietnam government could offer.

An effective operational level of command should have recognized the significance of these programs in attaining strategic and operational effectiveness within the context of an integrated national power response. Such recognition would have ultimately led to a reassessment and realignment of operational VISION. However, the discontinuity between strategy and tactics, created by the disruption of the operational command level, prevented this possibility.

Obviously, a fully aligned national policy/strategy with military strategy/operations provides the optimum environment. A correct assessment of the war's nature during the Johnson Administration might have ultimately led to a national decision to either maintain pre 1965 support levels or withdraw - based on a negative cost-benefit analysis. Members of President Johnson's "wise men" did consider disengagement much later but, by then, the political investment was too great.<sup>26</sup> The assumptions imposed by viewing the war as primarily an insurgency led to the belief that the U.S. could fight a limited war against insurgents and ignored the reality of the North Vietnam's unlimited war efforts and attainment of Clausewitz's Trinity. To paraphrase Clausewitz, a limited war can only be pursued when both parties agree - if one party chooses unlimited war the other party must either escalate or withdraw to avoid defeat. U.S. national leaders (esp. President Johnson) endeavored to create the desired end-state without disruption or mobilization of the American people by strategy/operations based on false assumptions and failed to elicit the total support of the people required to pursue an unlimited war.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless, the relative strength of U.S. national power was capable of achieving victory at the operational level, despite NCA imposed constraints, had the direction of its operational VISION and plans been congruent with the war's nature. This is evidenced by our near military victory at the end of the war despite the misdirection of effort. Time was a major factor in

U.S. political will. An earlier recognition of misdirection and invalid assumptions could have resulted in changes providing for more efficient and effective application of power. This could have brought an earlier conclusion and preceded the collapse of U.S. resolution. The adaptive planning process, with its requirement for the operational commander and staff to analyze the war within the full spectrum of national power and aims, would have provided the necessary framework in Vietnam for the operational level to formulate plans and MOE's congruent with the desired end-state in a more timely manner. Should the means available (subject to NCA imposed constraints) been insufficient or misdirected, the process would have facilitated operational level feedback for a national/strategic level reassessment based upon a more accurate cost-benefit and risk analysis.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The adaptive planning process requires the operational commander to view his responsibilities in context with national policy/strategy and desired end-state through the application of the full spectrum of national power. This, in turn, requires the operational commander to fully understand the nature of the war/crisis to correctly recommend national response options, select operational objectives and formulate effective, efficient and congruent operational plans and MOE's. Adaptive planning also provides essential operational feedback for reevaluation of basic premises/assumptions and cost-benefit/risk analyses. This paper portrays how the qualitative aspect of a war's nature affects all levels of war but especially the operational level. Desire to conduct a conventional military response initially prejudiced the analysis and increased high-level military recalcitrance toward change. Adaptive planning provides the framework to reassess flawed paradigms at the level uniquely situated to analyze the congruency of ends and means through valid MOEs. The process of reassessment, facilitated by operational level feedback based on valid MOEs, is essential to success. What one presupposes upon entering a conflict is often flawed and requires the willingness at all levels of command, above the tactical, to question basic assumptions and

conceptualizations if actions fail to achieve the desired results.

Unity of command and effort is fundamental to efficacious application of the operational art. Vietnam illustrates the cost of not observing this principle at the operational level. The war also provides a wealth of lessons to be learned in integrating elements of national power at the operational level to achieve a desired end-state. Several programs - CAP, Phoenix, CORDS - attempted to integrate various aspects of national power in coordinated military operational and tactical plans. Their inherent flaws and lack of sustainability resulted from military predilection toward conventional warfare and the dichotomy of program direction from NCA/national political will. The adaptive planning process provides a framework to address these incongruities through the increased participation of the operational level in the national response thereby offering increased hope for the alignment of national policy/strategy with military strategy, operations and tactical actions.

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